

JESUS OF NAZARETH
GRACE IS NOT FAIR (AND THAT'S A GOOD THING!)
MATTHEW 20:1-34
9-20-20

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Reflect

Philip Yancey: Grace, like water flows to the lowest part.

St. Augustine of Hippo: For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.

Welcome

Good Morning CCRC! God has graced us with a new day in which his mercies are also new and in which his grace is sufficient for whatever state or circumstance we find ourselves navigating. For those of you choosing to stay at home, we miss you but completely understand and support you. We all long for the day that we will all worship together again and give each other hugs and handshakes.

May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance!

Call to Worship Psalm 18:1-6

I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Christ Candle – Yemen

We live in a dark world. A significant portion of that darkness resides in the persecution of Christians around the world for their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. In America, in general, this persecution is minimal. We are free to be disciples of Jesus as individuals, as families and as congregations. We have it easy. That is not true for millions of Christians around the world where there are extreme consequences to being a disciple of Jesus from your family, others and the government. In many countries, it is illegal to be a Christian and punishable by imprisonment or death. For the foreseeable future, we will look at some of these countries as ranked by Open Doors USA to keep us aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ who need our prayers and help and to remind us to be grateful for how good we have it here.

The eighth hardest place to live as a Christian today in Yemen. Yemen's population is around 30 million of which only a few thousand are disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. An ongoing civil war in Yemen has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent memory, making an already difficult nation for



Christians even harder. The war has allowed radical Islamic groups to expand their operations in certain areas, leading to Christians being abducted and killed. Open church activities are forbidden and leaving Islam is forbidden. Muslims who decide to follow Jesus could face the death penalty.

Prayer Points: Pray for peace in Yemen as opposing forces continue to clash and leave Christians vulnerable. The instability in Yemen has created a refugee, food and healthcare crisis. Ask God to help provide food, clean water and relief to the people of Yemen. Pray that the secret believers from Muslim backgrounds will have courage and perseverance in their faith – along with access to Bibles and discipleship materials.

Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Song Sing To The King -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnFVXYnXWSU>

*Sing to the King who is coming to reign
Glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain
Life and salvation, His empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King*

*Come let us sing a song
A song declaring we belong to Jesus
He is all we need
Lift up a heart of praise
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus
Sing to the King*

*For his returning we watch and we pray
We will be ready the dawn of that day
We'll join in singing with all the redeemed
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King!*

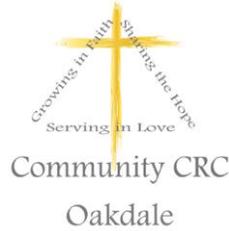
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Responsive Reading Christ: The True Vine

Jesus say, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the



branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples.

As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.

Song It Is Well With My Soul -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul*

*It is well (it is well)
With my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul*

*It is well (it is well)
With my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul*

*It is well (it is well)
With my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul*

Prayer

May this prayer of the Apostle Paul for the church in Ephesus be our prayer for one another today:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [asking] that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ



may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-20)

Offering

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

Baptism: Jameson and Paisley Loyd, children of Colin and Lindsey Loyd

Baptismal Grace:

1. Forgiveness (washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus)
2. United with Christ (dying and rising with him)
3. United with each other (together we are the body of Christ on earth)
4. Identity (we are God's beloved children)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 20:1-34

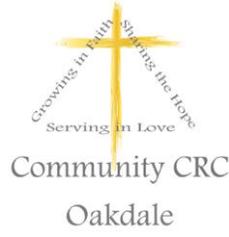
Gospel Message: Grace Is Not Fair (And that's A Good Thing!)

Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! John Newton, the author of the song, "Amazing Grace" knew grace. He was a slave trader who came to recognize his wretchedness and desperate need for God's grace to save him. He knew it was amazing because grace goes against the normative instincts of his/our fallen human nature. From the earliest days of our lives, we learn to live in a world that operates not on grace, but merit. Author Philip Yancey, in his book, What's So Amazing About Grace says it this way,

From nursery school onward we are taught to succeed in the world of ungrace. The early bird gets the worm. No pain, no gain. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Demand your rights. Get what you pay for. I know these rules well because I live by them. I work for what I earn; I like to win; I insist on my rights. I want people to get what they deserve – nothing more, nothing less.

"I want people to get what they deserve." That is merit. It is what is owed and it is what is fair. And, it is not grace.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe the lens you primarily see life through is one of merit and not grace; of earning and not receiving as a gift. Maybe like me, there are many times you would readily receive grace but are reluctant to give it out. Maybe like me, there are many times you would reject grace because "you are not a charity case" and not give it out because people need to take responsibility for their own welfare and you/I believe gifts of grace undermine this. Maybe like me, you find there are only too few examples of biblical grace in your/my life where you/I give what is not deserved or earned or worked for or merited and too many examples of ungrace, judgement, condemnation, payback, revenge, getting even and of stinginess and selfishness. Maybe like me you struggle a bit (or a lot) with part of our passage today from Matthew 20; the part about the laborer's in the field and the



“unfairness” of the “boss” to pay them all equally even though some worked 12 times as long as others. How can this be good or amazing? We will take a closer look at grace; what it is (grace illustrated) and how it got a face (grace incarnated); how it is lost (grace strangulated) and how to live graceful lives as disciples of Jesus (grace demonstrated) – Illustrated – Incarnated – Strangulated – Demonstrated. The theme though is: grace is unfair; and that’s a good thing.

First, an explanation of what grace is. Matthew 20:1-16 is one of the clearest explanations of grace we have. It is also one of the hardest because it shows very clearly what might be considered the scandalous nature of grace. Jesus is expounding on his last statement in chapter 19 that the last will be first and the first will be last. Once again, Jesus turns things around from how we, in our fallen nature tend to want to view and understand things. And this is especially true in America, land of capitalism and a strong work ethic to secure the American Dream for you and your family. Vocationally, work operates to pay those who earn what was agreed to. That is, it is a contract between two parties. When the working party does what was agreed to, they earn and deserve to get that which was agreed to be given to them – their wage or earnings or paycheck. But this is not the economy of heaven. The economy of heaven is grace and grace operates differently.

The scene is a vineyard for which the owner goes into town to hire workers. He goes to town five times, early – the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 11th hour (around 6AM, 9AM, 12 noon, 3PM and 5PM) to hire workers. The first group hired at 6AM and who will work a 12-hour day agree to a one denarius wage. The rest will get “whatever is right.” When the end of the day comes, the boss first calls the ones who only worked an hour and amazingly, they get a denarius; as does those who worked 3 hours, 6 hours, 9 hours and 12 hours. They all get the same denarius regardless of how long they worked. The first ones hired were not happy that they received the same as the last ones hired as they “bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” They felt that it was not fair that the last were treated “equally” as the first in regards to wages. And indeed, it seems they have a legitimate complaint. However, Jesus exposes their error and reveals the scandalous nature of grace. Jesus reminds the first group that they agreed to the denarius and so got exactly what was agreed upon. There was no breach of contract. There was no injustice. He was fair to them. They got what they earned. Jesus calls them, “friend” and to take what is theirs and go their way. He then reveals the heart of the story of grace. Jesus says the master has the right to choose to do what he wants with what belongs to him. And, the master chooses to be generous to the joy of those hired later. This is grace explained, illustrated in parable. The first ones hired are irked. It is not fair based on vocational ethics or the number of hours worked to earn the denarius. They are right. Grace is not fair according to those rules. The other should have gotten less than the first because they did not work as much. That is vocational ethics thinking but it is not grace. It is merit. Grace is different because it does not operate on vocational grounds of merit but on the generous love of the boss. The workers get more than what they deserve. It’s not fair - and that is a good thing!

Grace is God’s sovereign choice of generously giving what he wants, to whom he wants, when he wants. Grace is gift, it is not earned. It is not merited. It is not deserved. God’s grace is generous gift. The point of the parable is that we (the Gentiles) are the later laborers, getting the same reward (heaven) as the Jews for whom God has been in a relationship with for over a thousand years. The Jews



are jealous of the Gentiles because they expect that they should receive more. Yet, Jew and Gentile alike, in Christ will receive the exactly the same thing – heaven and eternal life with Christ Jesus. And this is the heart of the gospel; that eternal life is available to all, first and last, early and late because eternal life and heaven are not something that we earn but something that we receive as a gift and not as a wage. We don't earn heaven and eternal life; we receive it in Christ as a massively generous gift of love. The economy of heaven is grace, not meritorious works. It is love and not wages. The apostle Paul says to the disciples of Ephesus that we are saved by grace through faith and that this is not of ourselves or our own works lest we should boast but a gift of God that we should make much of him. Philip Yancey's definition of grace in his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* captures the heart of God's great love for us and that we cannot altar it by our works. He says that grace is that there is nothing I can do to make God love me any more than he already does and there is nothing I can do to make God love me any less. God's love is an unchangeable gift of grace to us. It is not based on our morality. It is not based on our good works (apart from Christ all are works are like dirty rags). It is not based on family pedigree. It is not based on anything other than God's great love for his fallen, sinful, rebellious creatures. Yet, while grace is costless gift for the receiver, it is costly wage for the giver.

Grace is not free. It costs. Jesus reminds them of this in the next verses although at this time they still don't understand. Jesus tells the 12 disciples again that they are headed to Jerusalem where he will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes to be tortured and crucified and raised on the third day. This is the cost of grace. The suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. This is the cost that Jesus gladly pays so that grace has a face. Jesus is grace with a face. John 1:17 says that the law came through Moses but grace came through Jesus of Nazareth. Grace with a face – Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus earned the wage that paid the penalty of sin by living the perfect life that we could not. He is perfectly righteous because he is perfectly obedient to the law of God, never sinning or breaking shalom. He then pays the ultimate price with his death, taking the full wrath and punishment of God for sin – death (for the wages of sin is death). We deserve the wages of sin but we don't get it. What is fair is that we are condemned for our sins. Hell is what is fair for sinners. We don't get hell because of Jesus of Nazareth. This is grace and it is not fair. And that is a good thing! In Christ, I get what I don't deserve (that's grace) and I don't get what I do deserve (that's mercy). In Christ, you get what you don't deserve. Even though Jesus never sinned, he became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ. His righteousness that he earned through perfect obedience becomes ours when we are united to Jesus. This is grace. This is our salvation and it is all gift for us and all the work of love for Jesus. Jesus overcomes sin so that through his blood we might be forgiven of our sins. Jesus overcomes death so that in Christ we might be born again to new life, eternal life in him. This is grace. This is gift. This is love. This is Jesus – grace with a face. This is grace incarnated (become flesh). This gift of grace in Jesus is a gift of being for the other; it is about seeking to serve rather than to be served. It is posturing ourselves to not operate in our relationship to others based on merit or works or what people deserve but on grace and love and mercy. This is made clear in the next verses.

Grace illustrated and grace incarnated. Now grace strangulated. Grace can be choke off. Matthew next reports that the mother of James and John comes to Jesus and asks him to grant her two boys the honor and power of sitting at Jesus' right and left hand. Jesus politely dismisses her and James and John by telling them they don't know what they are asking and that it is not up to him to determine



who will sit at his right and left hand. To sit at the right and left hand of a king is to be in the next two highest place of power and honor. Whenever the king would be seated on the throne, there would be James and John on either side. The other 10 are “indignant.” They are livid. They are outraged. They are irate. Rightly so because there is arrogance and pride in their request. Jesus calls them all together to set things straight and plainly tells them that in the empires of the world the economy is power and authority and ruling over. However, this is not the economy of the kingdom. The economy of the kingdom, as we just saw, is grace. In the kingdom of God as opposed to the empires of the world, the greatest will not be the ones on top with power over others but those on the bottom using their power to serve others. Grace serves. It is not served. Jesus points to himself as the example. He says the Son of Man (Jesus – grace with a face) came “not to be served but to serve.” The arrogance of pride strangulates grace; cuts off its lifegiving power to serve. Pride kills grace. Pride elevates one over the other in such a way that others may become obstacles to that person’s desire to be seen and known as best, elite, successful, beautiful, strong, powerful, etc. Pride only serves the best interest of the prideful one. Pride undermines grace. Pride, the mother of the other sins (envy, lust, greed, gluttony, anger, sloth) creates relationships that are one-way - my way, for me, about me and to me. Pride does not seek to serve the other for the others sake, out of compassion, mercy, grace or love. Seek to serve and not to be served. Seek to image the grace of Jesus of Nazareth to others.

Grace illustrated. Grace Incarnated. Grace strangulated. Now grace demonstrated. Grace transforms people. Grace takes people of pride and turns them into humble servants of God and others (the hard work of sanctification). As St. Augustine of Hippo says, “grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.” The Good News of grace is demonstrated through the good works of faith. And the good works of faith is the conduit in which the good news of grace flows. Pride and seeking to be served cuts off this flow of grace, strangulates it. Humility and seeking to serve opens it. The next scene in Matthew is about the demonstration of grace and the serving of others that Jesus just taught. Jesus teaches not so that we might simply know something but that we might do something. That doing is serving in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Two men are blind and calling out to Jesus for mercy but the crowd following Jesus tells them to shut up. But they don’t listen. They know Jesus is their one and only opportunity to be healed. They yell louder. Jesus hears them and stops to talk with them. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks. “Lord, open our eyes.” Jesus touches their eyes and they immediately could see and began to follow him. This is grace. This is a compassionate, gracious act of Jesus that heals and restores not only their physical sight, but their spiritual sight to. Jesus stops to serve those the crowds are telling to shut up.

Who in your life is God calling you to serve, to come alongside, to build up, to love and be gracious towards? How might you respond to Jesus question, “What do you want me to do for you.” Note the “for you” component of the question. That is grace. Jesus is offering an opportunity for grace to flow in their lives and he is offering that to us today. Yes, in Christ we have salvation through grace and grace alone. But that grace transforms us to put on Christ, to put on the face of grace and seek to respond with the good works of faith that serves Jesus and others like Jesus served the Father and others. Jesus is for us so that we might be for him and for one another. How might we be getting caught up in arrogant, prideful, grace strangulating situations instead of seeking to serve and being the face of grace to others? Ask for God’s grace to continue to shape you and mold you into the image and likeness of



Jesus of Nazareth (Imago Christi) so that we might daily demonstrate grace to others as we have received grace from Jesus.

Take some time and reflect on the words of the song, Amazing Grace below.

What is God calling your attention to?

How might you understand this song differently?

How might you live it out by being the face of grace to others?

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now I'm found; was blind but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come.

Twas grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

Communion Meditation

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

We believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven

Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,

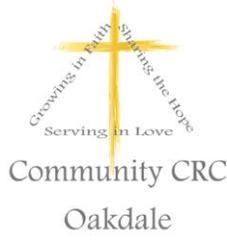
The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.



Song: Turn Your Eyes -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIDELcuYX3g>

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace*

*Turn your eyes to the hillside
Where justice and mercy embraced
There the Son of God gave His life for us
And our measureless debt was erased*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

*Turn your eyes to the morning
And see Christ the Lion awake
What a glorious dawn, fear of death is gone
For we carry His life in our veins*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

*Turn your eyes to the heavens
Our King will return for His own
Every knee will bow, every tongue will shout,
'All glory to Jesus alone!'*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus: Matthew 28:18-20 (Paraphrased)

Together we are the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Individually we are the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.
May we be the face of grace to others

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Therefore, as we are sent into the world by him, let us make disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. And let us remember and treasure that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. Amen!